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A MEDITERRANEAN DIARY

BY HARRIET BARD SQUIERS

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following letter was written to her sister by the widow of the Hon. Herbert G. Squiers, who was for many years in our diplomatic service. He was First Secretary of the American Legation in China and later was the first American Minister to Cuba and to Panama. The World War called Mrs. Squiers to service. She joined the active nursing force of the Hospice de St. Vincent de Paul, at Montmirail sur Marne. During the last part of the war she was Infirmière Major there, and served on through the Spring offensive of 1918, sticking to the hospital and running it with casual volunteer help when even the French équipe had been ordered to abandon it before the German advance. She was shelled and bombed continually, but her experience in the Boxer Rebellion at Peking, where she had to crawl about on her hands and knees to avoid being hit by the Boxer bullets which came in through the windows, had hardened her to that sort of thing. After the Armistice she was attached to a French hospital at Strasburg before being mustered out. She received a number of citations for bravery and devotion, besides the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française and the Croix de Guerre. Last Autumn she took service in an American hospital unit which was going to Syria, and the letter which follows, written in the form of a diary, is an account of her journey out and of her organization of a "Foyer" in General Gouraud's army. This diary, because of its exceptional interest and vividness, was secured for publication through the courtesy of Mrs. Squiers' family, and unknown to her.*

"Camp de la Paix," Alexandretta.

MY DEAR F.—:

I have been living in a whirlwind since I left Paris in March. Life has been like a cinema. I have sent you postals from every place, but have had no time to write. This letter is really a diary. It seems a year since we sailed from Marseilles, I have done and seen so much. We arrived at Alexandria on the 22d—such a wonderful trip, the sea like glass all the way, with marvellous sunsets, the people on board not very interesting. General G— and staff were the exception. The General was in Strasburg with me. He was en route to Beyrout, to be with General Gouraud. Nearly

every one left the ship to go to Cairo, as she took three days to unload her cargo, and we had time before the train left to look about the town. Alexandria is not interesting, except for local coloring, and seemed to me like China and all other Eastern towns. The train trip was interesting, passing native villages and caravans of camels. We saw the Nile only just before reaching Cairo, where we arrived about nine o'clock. We went to Shepherd's Hotel, and got to bed as quickly as possible, realizing that we had only three days to see all the interesting things and places. In the morning, from my little porch, I had my first glimpse of the town. Such a conglomeration of people!—every nation of the world. As for the town, the foreign part, one might fancy one was in Nice or on the Riviera. The old town of Cairo is a maze of streets still full of charm, and M— and I started with our guide to see it. We passed through streets which twisted beneath overhanging balconies covered with wooden trellises of exquisite workmanship. We could hardly walk in the midst of a dense crowd of men and beasts, women veiled in black, men in long robes and white draperies, little donkeys with collars of blue beads, rows of camels carrying loads of lucerne, and above the little white houses one could see the tall minarets, from which you knew that you were in the adorable East. We went into all the shops; the only tempting things were the rugs, excepting some perfume. But oh! what filth and dirt!—quite Oriental. Again I recalled China. We then returned to the hotel, had a good luncheon, and ordered a carriage for the pyramids. We stopped at the Government House, as I had heard that Commander Allenby, Lord Allenby's brother, was there, a great friend of H—'s and mine. He was not there, but Lord Allenby came out and talked to M— and me.

We arrived at the pyramids at sunset. At a certain point we changed from the carriage, M— to ride a camel and I a donkey. I wondered if what we saw was a hill of sand; one could hardly tell. It seemed like a great rosy cloud, and from out of this cloud rose the Pyramids and the Sphinx, with its fixed eyes and smile, and, all about, the endless desert. It was marvellous—nothing to be seen but those three huge things standing upright and still. I cannot tell you how it impressed me. We returned to the hotel near the Pyramids for tea, which was painfully incongruous—music playing, fox trots, etc. I heard the call

of the Sphinx and the desert, and shut my eyes and ears, and longed to go back. Alas! too late; we had to return to Cairo.

Next day we went to Sakarra and Memphis by motor, to see the colossal statue of Rameses II and the many interesting things. We left the car in Memphis and went on donkeys to the tomb of Apis. Who should we meet in the Tombs but Clemenceau! I spent the afternoon visiting the wonderful mosques and citadel, tombs of the Mamelukes and the old Coptic Crypt where the Virgin Mary rested with Jesus in the Flight into Egypt. We then went to the ruins of Babylon, and then to see the spot where Moses was hidden in the bulrushes. We returned, dead tired, to Cairo, for dinner and the ten o'clock train to Alexandria, as our steamer sailed the next afternoon, and we dared not stop longer. Oh! the beautiful Nile! I shall never be happy until I can go in a dahabeah up that wonderful river, where the women in their black robes come to fill their long-necked jars, and carry them on their veiled heads,—the shepherds bringing their goats, sheep, and water buffaloes, all mixed together to drink. The birds are lovely—all colors; the blue kingfishers and a bird that looks bronze, green, purple, and bright yellow. The one beautiful songster is the skylark. I never saw such wonderful poppies; when the sunshine strikes them they are like colored flames against the deep blue of the sky. The country is radiant with them. One cannot but love Egypt. I shall never forget the little I have seen of it.

* * *

We arrived in Alexandria, lunched, then boarded our ship, jolly glad to rest. We reached Port Said the following morning, and spent the day there. It was nothing new to me. We left Port Said in the evening, and stopped at Jaffa, As it was for only a short time, I did not go ashore, as I knew I should see it again. We arrived at Beyrout on the 28th, Palm Sunday. The town is very dirty, but the country is beautiful. Monday we lunched with General Gouraud. M— sat at his right and I at his left. He was charming. After lunch he made me play *poilu* songs, and he seemed to enjoy them. M— then arranged for us to go to Jerusalem, as we could not come here till the camp had moved higher in the hills. At 7 o'clock Monday night we were off in the little steamer *Manon* for Haifa, to take the train for Jerusalem. Maybe we didn't have to rush!—just time

to pack a little handbag. On the steamer were a lot of the Beyrout American College students, also going to Jerusalem. We had great fun singing. I played all the evening, and we sang "Drink to me only with thine eyes." On arriving in the morning at Haifa, we found our train and were off to the Holy City. The train was crowded, and I found myself going into a compartment with an English General and his wife, Sir W— G—. I politely begged their pardon and was backing out, but the General would not hear of it. So down I sat, and enjoyed every minute, for he pointed out the sites of all the battles and the troops' difficulties when entering Jerusalem. One never could imagine them unless one saw the country. A strange thing happened. Before leaving Paris, B— said, "Mother, be careful. I dreamed you were on a train with a general. The train was wrecked and you were killed." Well, if we had arrived the day before, and had taken the train, I probably should have been killed, as the train was wrecked and many were killed. I felt nervous when I saw the general, remembering B—'s dream, and was glad when we reached our journey's end in safety. We arrived after dark, and were whirled off in a carriage to the Grand New Hotel.

The next day was Holy Thursday. It did not seem possible that I was in Jerusalem, the dream of my life. Here is the old Testament and the New, all nations, Moslem, Jewish, Greek, Latins, Armenians and Protestants. We went to the service on Holy Thursday in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and were locked in from one o'clock till five. The service was beautiful, the music most lovely. An English priest was with us, and showed us all around the church. On one side Greeks, on the other Armenians and Catholics. Before the altar, wonderful jeweled lamps were hanging, and the jewels on the Virgin Mary, in glass cases, were worth a fortune. I went into the Holy Sepulchre and said my prayers. I could not realize that I was praying at Christ's tomb.

In the evening we had a remarkable service in the church where the Virgin Mary is buried, just outside of the Garden of Gethsemane. We then went to the Garden of Gethsemane, and saw it by moonlight, the white light flooding the Mount of Olives and the Garden. To think that we were walking over the very ground on which Our Lord had walked! The Greek Church is near the Garden of Geth-

semane. The Patriarch had been taken prisoner, and the key retained by the Turks, so the Protestants were having their service outside the church in the moonlight, and one heard in the silence "Abide with Me." It was all wonderful to me—so many different ways to the same God! Some said that it took all religious feeling away from them; to me it was inspiring. Good Friday was an unforgettable day. It was also a great Mohammedan feast. I went to church and to the Way of the Cross, through the street of the Via Dolorosa. I then joined M——. We took a carriage and went to see the great Mohammedan procession. Such crowds, the hills covered by every nation in their vivid costumes; such coloring, and such a picture! Over the hills one hears the drums and the weird chanting as the procession approaches slowly. You see, carried on the back of one of the Arabs, one of the leaders brandishing a sword in the air to the rhythm of the music, and the crowds clapping their hands, and the weird, weird chant. It took them hours to pass. When M—— and I returned we were quite ready for dinner. We had changed our hotel and gone to the Convent Nôtre Dame de France, which had a charming situation. One could see the Mount of Olives and the Holy Sepulchre. I did not go out in the evening. I had too much to think of.

* * *

~ Saturday we went to Bethlehem and spent the morning. In the afternoon we went to the Mount of Olives. In the evening I looked from my window, and in the sky hung an enormous cross. It is on the dome of the Sepulchre, and is illuminated only on Easter Eve. On Easter morning I got up at half-past five for mass. I bought many rosaries, had them blessed, and at the Communion service at Christ's Tomb I laid them on the Tomb. One I bought for General Gouraud, who is a devout Catholic. Never will I forget the service. While we were having our service, Greeks were having theirs, Armenians theirs. All the church was lighted, and you never saw anything more gorgeous than all the lighted jeweled lamps. There were two monks with angelic voices. M—— and I had to leave for Beyrout on the ten o'clock train, as we were due here the beginning of the week. The morning we left, they had the great fight between the Jews and the Mohammedans. While the High Mass was going on there was fighting in

the streets. Again I have not told you half the things I want to—all about the wonderful mosque of Omar, and many other things.

It was with sadness that M—— and I left Jerusalem. We had to go to Haifa to catch a boat to Beyrout. We arrived late, and went to a "Hospice Allemand," having been told by the English officers in Jerusalem that it was the best, and run by French sisters. The "French sisters" proved to be Germans. As it was filled with English, we stopped. The country was lovely, but the place was full of Boches. M—— and I started on the following day for Jaffa to catch the boat. We had to wait three days. I lived through it, as it was so interesting. I went to Simon the Leper's House,—at least, to the place where it once was,—and to the House of Tabitha. I lived in the days of the Bible. We arrived in Beyrout on the 11th of April, and had to wait till the 17th to come here. General Gouraud and everyone gave us a rare time. We lunched and dined with him, and he could not do too much for us. We were invited to have tea with an Emir. He had a fascinating house outside of Beyrout, right on the sea. We had all kinds of queer things for tea.

We said *adios* to Beyrout on the 17th. It took us three days on the boat, as we stopped all along the coast. We wanted so much to get off and see Tripoli, but we had a terrible rain storm. Fortunately it was over when we reached Latakieh. F—— will know all about it from the Odyssey. It is a lovely spot. We all had coffee with the commanding officers. Afterward we went for a walk through the native village. John wrote some of the Revelation in the Convent. One street consisted of nothing but beautiful Roman arches.

There are now only three of us, and I am alone in the camp. I have made it, I think, a success. M— and Mrs. K—— have gone to establish another *Foyer du Soldat* in Rilis. We arrived in Alexandretta on the 20th, and came to camp on the 21st. I must tell you the most remarkable coincidence. The night before coming up here, we were invited to dine on General Gouraud's yacht. The General had sent Monsieur de Caix on a special mission to General Obey (our general). We all lunched at the

general's, and then went in the evening to dine. As it was dark, I could not see the boat from the outside, but the minute I boarded her I thought, "How familiar this yacht looks! I am sure it is our old yacht, the *Norseman*." And it was! The French Government bought her from Lord L—; they changed her name to *Albatross*.

The next morning M— and I were up bright and early, and off to camp to arrange the tents before the others came on the following day. The sky and sea were so blue that it was hard to tell one from the other; the birds were singing, and the fields were filled with daisies, poppies, wild carrots, and all sorts of wild flowers. Up on the top of the highest hill were dotted white tents. These hills are glorious, covered with flowers, and so green. A little distance from the camp, our tents were waiting for us. Naturally, there was great excitement among the poilus and officers. M— and I started in at once, and by night had the beds up and things started. Such fun! After a few days, M— and K— were sent to Adana, and I was left with the three maids.

While they were gone, I worked like a dog to have everything arranged before M— returned. I wish you could see the officers' room, and the *sous-officiers'*. I made them really attractive. I went down to Alexandretta, found some one who could speak Arabic, and spent my day in the native part of the town. I found some black panels covered with flowers, and bought enough to panel the sides of the tents; found mats, such as we had in China, bought big drinking jars and long pillows, and got enough blue to cover the divans and make a curtain for the entrance of the tent. Then back to camp, and next day how I worked! I had the tables and benches painted black, and also the jars. When the panels were up, and the divans covered with the yellow and blue and filled with cushions, I had the room filled with flowers and the jars filled with branches of genet, the writing tables made ready, and books and papers provided. The *sous* room was the same, except that the covering was blue and white.

It would have made you weep to see the gratitude of the officers and men at the little touch of home. M— and K— were delighted. It has made the *Foyer* celebrated, and everyone in Beyrout knows of it.

Every night, from the first, I was out with my poilus,

having a concert under the moon and stars, and giving them cigarettes. You should have heard them sing. My *poilus* are having a barrack built, and if I cannot find a piano, General Gouraud will send me his. Every afternoon we had tea for the officers at five; at six, coffee for the *poilus*. I can tell you, they are happy. M— has started a remarkable work; one cannot realize, unless one is here to see, how necessary it is to introduce a little joy into the lives of these dear *poilus* and officers, so far away from their homes and loved ones, and in a country where there is nothing to amuse them, and where it is impossible to get any creature comforts. The General gave them a cinema and phonograph, and we keep them gay. We have no fruits and few vegetables; the natives are too lazy to grow them. I have a little flower garden in front of the officers' tent; if I were staying, I should plant vegetables, for the earth is so rich that anything will grow. I fancy the French will do so, as soon as things are more settled. The brigands are everywhere in the hills; every night they have their signals, and it takes me back to the Western Hills after the siege, among the brigands, with an American guard. I long to walk in the hills, but no one is allowed. Their homes are the color of the soil and cannot be seen, but they see you easily, and you never come back. I have a guard of *spahis* on one hill near the tent, and one of *poilus* on a hill quite a little distance off. We have trenches all around which were dug by the Turks, and jolly good ones.

We sent a lot of our men to take a town about fifty kilometers from here. I was so sad to see them marching away, boys of nineteen and twenty, and after five years of war. It is terrible. Thank God they are back, only one killed; and they took the town. We have the Senegalese troops also, and *spahis*. The *spahis* are a picture in their red capes, white turbans and brown, with their dark faces beneath, and framed by the glorious country. When coffee and cigarette-time arrives, they come like masses of black clouds. As they all look alike to me, they get more than their share of cigarettes. They stick out first one black hand and then the other, and as the *spahis* never touch pinard, I give them lemonade.

Now I must tell you the tragedy. Night before last we had almost a cyclone. At twelve o'clock the maids and I had to fly to the house of the *Pigeons Voyageurs* for

safety. All the tents were blown down, also the *poilus'*, and the officers' papers were blown to sea. Well, I just damned that vile wind and thought, "Build not treasures on this uncertain planet." Also, I almost wept; so did all of us. Never mind! In two days I shall have them up again and in order. The Captain of the Senegalese gave me a squad of his soldiers to help me unearth the wreck. In a short time all was brought here in my *poilus'* barracks, where I am until the tents are up again. I felt like the refugees, seeing my belongings being carried in. The captain in charge of the camp came while the Senegalese were working. They are wonderful. In one of the battles, their captain told me, his sergeant stood always in front of him. He ordered him to "Go behind!" but the Sergeant answered, "No, my captain, for if a ball comes, it kills me and not you." He also said to me, "Never be afraid, madame, if the brigands come, we shall save you." One of them had a big knife in his belt. I asked him what he did with it. He answered, "Brigands say no like Frenchee. I kill one, two, three." They are splendid, ink-black men, straight as arrows, and powerful. I know them well, as I cared for many in the hospital.

I shall have a picture taken of the camp and of my soldiers, and shall send it to you. You should see me with the pigeons! I feed them twice a day. They are on my head, arms, and shoulders. As this is called "my camp" I can do anything I want. I hope M—— won't return till I am all in order again. If she sees the tents gone she will think the brigands have taken me. We are to have three generals, and, in a few days, fifteen thousand troops. They will be spread all around this part of the country. It is so interesting, and, as I said, a splendid work.

I shall have to stay here until M—— finds some one to take my place. After all is organized, it will not be difficult. When I say that I am going, you should hear them! The General says he will have me chained. . . .